



HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

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EXHIBIT 15

DATE 1-31-07

HB 2

January 30, 2007

TO: Montana State Legislature
RE: Energy Ombudsman
FROM: Jewell Sorlie
Energy Ombudsman, HRDC DISTRICT 7 ~ Billings

Energy Ombudsman Purpose:

- ✓ To assist low-income customers (eligible for LIEAP ^{200%} +150% of poverty level)
 - Client education materials to help weatherize their home
 - Alternative information and help in paying their energy bills through various Energy Assistance programs such as - Energy Share, LIEAP, budget billing, Utility discounts, etc.
 - Information about income tax credit and rebate incentives from utilities.
 - Taking referrals from other agencies and from other programs throughout HRDC.
 - Answering questions over the phone and going to homes to evaluate problems.
- ✓ Encourage and enable households to reduce their home energy burdens by offering FREE "Weatherization Works" classes.
These classes include the information on **Exhibit A**
(example of letter sent to LIEAP Clients is attached)
- ✓ Focus on clients in homes that have slipped through the weatherization cracks such as:
 - Asbestos, no Land lord agreement and multi unit homes.
 - As Ombudsman I can offer them some low cost/no cost materials and Client Education about saving money on their energy consumption and offer them referrals to other agencies that may be able to help them if I can not. I may be able to offer them "Warm Hearts Warm Homes" weatherization. At least they will know that we are aware of the circumstance and are trying to help.



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Energy Ombudsman Purpose: (continued)

- ✓ Focus on the priority numbers 2000 to 4000 + in our five county area.
Working from the end of the priority list forward.

(Our regular energy audits will probably never get to these higher priority numbers since they must start with number ONE and work their way up the priority list. Number ONE being the homes with the highest energy burden – theoretically meaning these homes must be the worst and need the most help. *However*, what I have witnessed are some of those clients with these higher priority numbers are there primarily due to such low energy consumption. I see them wrapped in blankets with a hat on, the lights off and thermostat down to 60 or less and they are generally elderly. They almost have hypothermia trying to be conservative and responsible bill payers. They have the energy bills and prescriptions on the table and their cupboards are almost bare and yet they are the ones who tell me “That is OK dear, I can get by. Please go help someone else who really needs it.” Many of these clients have been on LIEAP for two years or more and have never been weatherized and probably will not be because their PRIORITY NUMBER is so high. *These are the clients who need the Energy Ombudsman the most.* They have paid their dues and worked hard all their lives and should not have to suffer because they can no longer keep up maintenance on their home. They need an advocate to help them weatherize and be comfortable in their homes.)

- ✓ Community outreach to get the word out to everyone via
 - News paper ads in the Gazette
 - Home show booth at the Metra
 - TV spots on “Hello Montana” that run several times (ABC and FOX stations)
- ✓ Offer presentations to organizations and businesses that have contact with those individuals who may benefit from HRDC’s Energy Assistance and Weatherization programs.

Presentations have been given to –

Senior Citizens Centers throughout our five county area,
AARP
Mental Health Center
Home Health care businesses
Migrant Council
LIFTT
RSVP
Meals on Wheels
Community Task Force meetings
and many other churches and associations.



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Energy Ombudsman Purpose: (continued)

At these presentations it is also expressed that community volunteers are welcome to help weatherize homes through the "Warm Hearts Warm Homes" program. After screening the volunteers I offer the training, the materials and the client's addresses whom they will be assisting. They must sign various waivers and confidentiality forms that are kept on file along with their volunteer hours.

✓ HRDC Employee presentations

The in-service presentations to our HRDC employees reaffirm that we all serve Low Income Clients. Our own employees are a vital component to convey other assistance options for our clients. It is imperative the employees understand the LIEAP and Weatherization programs and are able to communicate that information to their clients about what these programs can do to help them and refer them to the Energy Ombudsman.

Documentation:

There are records of all these activities and the volunteers who have served.
Each client has a file with the cost of materials which were installed into their homes.
There are codes put into the CDS to record for ROMA
There are evaluation survey taken

- At every presentation
- From volunteers
- From each client

Incentive purchases:

Weatherization Energy Conservation incentives are ordered and given to clients and at presentations. Some of the items include

- Magnetic thermometers
- Cards that test the temperature to see how hot the water is from the water heater
- Cards to put inside the refrigerator to make sure it is at optimal temperature
- Outlet gaskets (to help stop air leaks around outlets and switches)
- Booklets and pamphlets related to various energy tips around the home



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Results :

Client Surveys have been very favorable. Complaints from clients this heating season are being addressed and resolved. The majority of the client surveys returned stated how thankful and grateful they were to have received such good service.

Volunteer survey response has been positive. The volunteer surveys conveyed some valuable constructive criticism that will be taken under advisement.

Presentation surveys overall have returned with very high affirmative response.

Closing:

The Energy Ombudsman and "Warm Hearts Warm Homes" programs are necessary, especially since many of the people we help seem to have been on LIEAP and requiring our services for more than two years. They are waiting patiently for weatherization, but their priority number is so high, chances are that we may never get to them for the full benefit of our regular weatherization program. Many of these elderly people are at the end of turning for help, have no where else or no one else to go to. They feel they can struggle through ~ they made it through the depression and other hardships ~ but they were younger and more resilient then.

I am proud to serve as an advocate for people who require help with their energy circumstances. I am rewarded every time I get a smile or hug from a client who thinks I have made a difference in their world. I feel confident we are making a difference – if only one home at a time - it is making a difference so the last will not be least.

Thank you for the opportunity to share with you my testimony as HRDC DISTRICT 7 Energy Ombudsman.

Sincerely,

Jewell Sorlie
Energy Ombudsman and Client Education Specialist
HRDC DISTRICT 7
7 North 31st Street
Billings, MT 59103
jsorlie@hrdc7.org
406-247-4768

EXHIBIT A

January 4, 2007

Dear ,

I am with the weatherization program at HRDC and the work I do is at no cost to you. You meet the eligibility guidelines through your LIEAP application and your home is on our priority list. We would like to help you **save money** on your heating and electric bills by offering you a free informational class to help you weatherize your home. Some of the energy saving low cost, no cost ideas and materials we would like to describe to you are:

- Smoke and Carbon Monoxide detectors
- Faucet aerators and flow restrictors to help reduce your hot water cost.
- Compact Florescent Light bulbs (CFL)
- Hot water heater wrap
- Plastic on your windows to help insulate for the winter
- Weatherstrips around doors
- Where to Caulk or foam the penetrations that allow warm air to leak freely from your home. (or allow cold air to freely enter your home.)

When you attend your first weatherization class

You will receive free

- ✓ four compact fluorescent light bulbs
- ✓ money saving tips and information *to help cut costs all year round*
- ✓ and you may be eligible for "Warm Hearts Warm Homes" minor weatherization

Weatherization classes will be held at HRDC main office building in Billings
On the corner of 31st and Montana Ave. in the **CARBON ROOM** on the first floor

Wednesday January 24, 2006 12-1 PM

Any questions ~ you may call me directly at 247-4768, or
1-800-433-1411 and ask for Jewell who works in the Weatherization Department.

Please leave the following information if I am away from my phone:

- A) *Your name and town you live in*
- B) *A Phone number (home, work, cell and/or a message contact number)*
- C) *A clear message stating the best time to contact you and that you received this letter*

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

I hope we can help you stay warmer this winter and will hear from you soon.

Sincerely,

Jewell Sorlie

Energy Ombudsman and Client Education Specialist with HRDC WEATHERIZATION DEPARTMENT